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Bullene, Moore, Emery & Company Building
(Emery, Bird & Thayer Building)
1016-18 Grand Avenue
Kansas City
Jackson County
Missouri

HABS No. MO-138

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE AND HISTORICAL DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY

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BULLENE, MOORE, EMERY AND COMPANY
(Emery, Bird, Thayer Dry Goods Company)

HABS No. MO-138

Location

Before demolition in 1973, the building was located at 1016-18 Grand Avenue, Kansas City, Jackson County, Missouri

Geographic Location Code: Latitude: 39° 06' 04"
Longitude: 94° 34' 52"

Present Owner:

The last owner of the building, who demolished it to provide space for a new company office building, was the City National Bank and Trust Company of Kansas City.

Present Use:

From its construction until 1968, the building was used as a department store.

Significance:

The Bullene, Moore, Emery and Company store (known since 1895 as Emery, Bird, Thayer) was a commercial institution of outstanding significance for several generations of Kansas Citians. The firm and its predecessors had provided quality merchandise to Kansas City since 1863. An important element in the commercial development of the central business district in the late nineteenth century, the store remained the most well-known local merchandising establishment in the city until it was closed in 1968. In addition to historical significance, the store building was among the principal works of one of nineteenth-century America's most important architects, Henry Van Brunt.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: The open land upon which the store was constructed was a subdivision of Swope's addition, and has the following legal description:

East 110.5' of lots 47, 48; south 32' of east 110.5 of lot 49; all of lots 75, 67, 77, 78; and beginning at the southwest corner of lot 78 and north 128 feet, then west 16.5 feet, then south 128 feet, then east 16.5 feet to beginning, being the vacated alley lying west of lots 76, 77, 78 and east of lots 47, 48, 49. The Land List Index in the Register of Deeds, Jackson County Courthouse, indicates that the property was owned by the Boston Ground Rental Trust Company and on April 22, 1890, a 99-year lease on the property was given to the Merchants Building Association for 557,280 grains of pure gold per year (approximately \$24,000). On June 1, 1956, the property was transferred to Clifford A. Clark and the Real Estate Investment Trust of America. On November, 1968, it was deeded briefly to

Emery Bird Thayer Dry Goods Company, and then to Auto Lee Stores, Inc., on June 15, 1969. The City National Bank and Trust Company received title on February 26, 1971, and demolished the building in 1973.

2. Date of erection: Begun 1889; completed 1890
3. Architects: Van Brunt & Howe. Henry Van Brunt is best known as an essayist and for his translation of Viollet de Duc's Discoveries on Architecture. After graduating from Harvard, he worked with William Robert Ware and founded his own architectural firm in Boston in 1866. Frank Howe joined the firm as a partner in 1868. When a branch office of the firm opened in Kansas City in 1887, Van Brunt became the first prominent American architect to reside and work west of the Mississippi River. In 1899, he was elected president of the American Institute of Architects. In addition to the store building for Bullene, Moore, Emery and Company, the firm's major works include the Episcopal Theological Seminary in Cambridge and Harvard's Memorial Hall. Other Kansas City commissions included the Coates House Hotel, the old Bryant Building, and the Kansas City Casino at the St. Louis World's Fair.
4. Alterations and additions: The exterior of the building suffered few major alterations through the years. Before 1939, hanging bays within the arcades on the Walnut Street facade had been renewed and the upper section of the tall arcade on the Walnut and 11th Street facades had been filled in. The natural red brick and sandstone facades were painted grey in 1955, and cream with gold trim in 1964.

North of the original 1890 building on Grand Avenue was a 3-bay addition which repeated the design elements of the original building, including the arcades. By 1892, the store was apparently already feeling the need for additional space and Van Brunt and Howe were commissioned to design a building for lot 75 of Swopes addition, north of the alley which ran behind the store from Walnut Street to Grand Avenue. Van Brunt's design called for a simple 2-bay, 3-story building with interior framing designed to make possible later expansion to 5 stores. The design of the facade was unrelated to that of the earlier building. The first two floors of the new building served as additional retail space for the store, while the third floor was designed as a Lodge Hall for a fraternal order. Whether this building was actually ever constructed is unclear. The Kansas City Star (February 11, 1971) reported that in 1904, the store purchased the old Kansas City Times building immediately to the north, later adding two more buildings. By 1909, however, the 3-bay addition, repeating the elements of the

original design, was completed. The Kansas City Times (April 13, 1909) reported that \$100,000 had been spent on alterations, including a 72-foot long extension of five stores north on Grand Avenue. Inspection of the addition indicated that it may have incorporated an earlier existing building, possibly that designed by Van Brunt in 1892. If this were the case, it was altered by the originally planned addition of two stories, the facade was removed and replaced, and the empty alley space between the two buildings was filled by an additional bay.

The interior of the store had been cosmetically altered over the years to suit changing tastes, but the basic plan of most of the store and its architectural details were unaltered. In 1909, the Kansas City Times (October 13, 1909) reported that recent alterations included "... substitution of rich mahogany and rosewood fixtures for the old oak ones at a cost of more than \$175,000." This probably refers mainly to display cases and other non-architectural elements, since the original plans call for the interior panelling and other woodwork to be cherry. One of the most famous interior spaces, an ornate Victorian tea room installed in 1893, was virtually destroyed in 1941 when it was converted to a cafeteria (Kansas City Times, July 18, 1968).

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The firm of Bullene, Moore, Emery and Company may be traced to 1863, when Lothrop Bullene from Lawrence, Kansas, and his brother, Thomas Brockway Bullene, went into partnership with Kersey Coates in a small store at the northwest corner of Missouri Avenue and Main Street. In 1865, Lothrop bought Coate's interest and moved the store to the northeast corner of Sixth and Main Streets, renaming it L. Bullene & Brother. In 1867, William E. Emery from Flemington, New Jersey, bought into the firm and the name was changed to Bullene Brothers & Emery. Lothrop Bullene sold his interest in the firm in 1868. In 1870, Lysander T. Moore from Kentucky joined the firm; the store was moved to a three-story building on Seventh Street between Main and Delaware and the firm renamed Bullene, Moore, & Emery. In 1875, Joseph T. Bird, who had been in Kansas City since 1868 and was related to William Emery, also joined the firm and was followed by the addition of W. B. Thayer in 1884. The name was changed once again to Bullene, Moore, Emery & Company. By 1888, the dramatic growth of the city and a thriving business dictated the need for a new building. Van Brunt and Howe, who had come to Kansas City in 1887 and were already engaged in the design and construction of the new Coates' House Hotel, were given the commission, and "the most magnificent emporium west of Chicago" was opened in September 1890 on Eleventh Street between Walnut and Grand. Thomas Bullene, who had been elected Mayor of Kansas City in 1882, died in 1894; Lysander Moore sold his interest, and on December 6, 1894, the store's name

was changed to Emery, Bird, Thayer Dry Goods Company. The firm's new name survived the deaths of the partners and was maintained until the store closed in 1968. Mrs. Joseph Bird was president of the company until her death in 1937 and her son-in-law, Porter T. Hall, sold the store in 1945 to the St. Louis firm of Scruggs-Vandervoort-Barney. In 1963, the store was sold to the Marshall-Wells Corporation of Norwich, Connecticut, which merged with the Larchfield Corporation 1966. With most of the commercial activity having left the downtown area for the suburbs, the store was closed in 1968.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Various photographs and drawings of the building at different periods are found in view books and collections in the Missouri Valley Room of the Kansas City Public Library. Renderings of the building during its construction period were published in the Kansas City Globe (February 10, 1890) and in Picturesque and Descriptive Kansas City. Pen Sketches of Bullene, Moore, Emery & Co. (including many interior views) was published in the 1890s, and a booklet of exterior and interior views were published by the store on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary in 1913. The Ehinger Construction Company of Kansas City has some excellent exterior photographs taken about 1930.

2. Bibliography:

- a. Primary and unpublished sources:

- Plans

- b. Secondary and published sources:

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- Hughes Annual Views of Kansas City, 1901, Kansas City, Hughes Publishing Company, 1900.

- Kansas City Globe, February 10, 1890.

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September 4, 1949; July 22, 1955; January 1, 1963;
February 11, 1971.

b. Secondary and published sources, cont'd.:

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September 21, 1913; September 13, 1915; July 18, 1968.

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Tiernan-Havens Printing Company, n.d.

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